

MINUTES
Alaska Resource Advisory Council Meeting
Anchorage Federal Building, Denali Room
February 5-6, 2004

Thursday, February 5, 2004

Council members present:

Charlie Boddy
Tom Crafford
Phil Driver
Randy Frank
Gary Gustafson
Teresa Imm
Sandra Key
Suzanne McCarthy
Susan Olsen
Jim Posey (via teleconference)
Larry Taylor
David van den Berg, Chair
Evie Witten

BLM representatives present:

Henri Bisson State Director
June Bailey, Anchorage Field Office
Ramone McCoy, Glennallen Field Office
Bob Schneider, Northern Field Office
Jerry Brossia, Joint Pipeline Office
Gary Reimer, Conveyances
Debbie Hollen, Resources
Jim Ducker, Resources
John Payne, Resources
Linda Ricketts, Information Resources
Craig Frichtl, Cadastral Survey
Dennis Walworth, Cadastral Survey
Teresa McPherson, RAC recorder

Council member absent:

Keith Tryck

Chair David van den Berg called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

After introductions, the chair explained council member Paul Roehl had resigned due to commitments at his new job. The council reviewed and accepted the meeting agenda.

The council approved minutes of the November 13-14, 2003, RAC meeting as written.

State Director's Update

- **Northwest NPR-A:** a lease sale is scheduled for early June. The Record of Decision defers leasing in the Colville Special Area until the South NPR-A plan. Some cultural protections were put back in since the draft. The plan is a balanced document that supports exploration and provides appropriate protections.
- **Northeast NPR-A:** BLM recently met with Nuiqsut officials to discuss the amendment and address concerns. A separate meeting in Barrow was well attended. BLM may exclude nine

townships in the Teshekpuk Lake area from exploration due to sensitive bird habitat, but lease the lake itself with appropriate protections. Bisson discussed the range of alternatives and assured council members BLM's decision would strike a reasonable balance.

- **Recordable disclaimers:** BLM Alaska has issued the first disclaimer to the State; others are in the works. Utah BLM is currently processing the first recordable disclaimer for an R.S. 2477 route.

Jerry Brossia: TransAlaska Pipeline System Reconfiguration

Owner companies want to reconfigure the pipeline system to increase automation and minimize costs. The reconfiguration plan calls for centralized maintenance/spill response centers and remote pipeline operation from one control center.

Concerns include workforce reduction, Native hire issues, reliability of equipment and demolition of facilities. The Joint Pipeline Office will oversee an environmental assessment and conduct field inspections. Implementation is expected in 2004 and 2005.

BREAK

Field Manager Updates

Bob Schneider, Northern Field Office

- NPR-A: environmental assessments for ConocoPhillips and TOTAL winter operations were completed in early Dec. A total of 4-5 wells are planned for the 2003-2004 winter season. Tundra travel was approved Dec. 12.
- Arctic Interagency Visitor Center (Coldfoot): Exhibits have been installed. The official opening is set for July 1.
- Kobuk-Seward Peninsula RMP: The RMP will address planning issues for 13 million acres in northwest Alaska. Scoping meetings will begin in late March. Issues include management of the Western Arctic caribou herd, conflicts between subsistence and sports hunting in the Squirrel River area, and fire management.
- Yukon Quest Sled Dog Race (Feb 2004): BLM permits 30 miles of race course in the Birch Creek Wild and Scenic River corridor. This year BLM required race officials to post a performance bond (certificate of deposit) to cover potential cleanup costs.

Henri Bisson commended Schneider for his work on North Slope issues. Bisson said Schneider's frequent visits to the area have had a positive effect on BLM's relationship with local residents.

As the RAC's liaisons on this plan, Charlie Boddy said it would be helpful if he and Teresa Imm attended the next Northeast NPR-A meeting on the Slope. Bisson concurred. Schneider said the meeting might be held in Nuiqsut in conjunction with the next NPR-A Subsistence Advisory Panel meeting.

Ramone McCoy, Glennallen Field Office

- Gulkana River planning: The draft EA was released in Dec. BLM has 17 renewal applications for commercial use on the river. Since the State owns portions of the river between high water marks, BLM and DNR are working together to monitor conditions based on recommendations from a 1999 river survey.
- East Alaska RMP: BLM is currently analyzing comments from 30 scoping meetings in communities and villages throughout the Copper Basin. BLM will offer proposals and alternatives for the plan at a second round of public meetings in April and May.
- BLM will hold a Bering Glacier workshop in Anchorage in late Feb. to review status of current research and discuss the upcoming field season. Bisson noted the Bering Glacier site is a world-class research camp and might make an interesting field tour.

June Bailey, Anchorage Field Office

- Ring of Fire RMP: Major issues identified during scoping include access, OHV use and designation, mineral resources, coal bed natural gas, commercial recreation, and interagency coordination. The draft RMP/EIS is expected March 2005, with final plan that Sept.
- Subsurface estate: this is emerging as an issue in Ring of Fire scoping, specifically, coal bed natural gas. BLM is prohibited from leasing subsurface estate within the boundaries of incorporated towns or cities, like Palmer or Wasilla. The Ring of Fire plan will propose a range of alternatives for addressing coal bed leasing under existing BLM regulations.
- AFO has begun pre-planning for The Bay RMP, which covers both the Bristol Bay and Goodnews Bay areas.

Charlie Boddy said he would take Paul Roehl's seat as liaison on the Ring of Fire plan. Sandra Key suggested BLM tap The Nature Conservancy's databases for the Ring of Fire planning area.

Jim Ducker: Alpine Satellite Draft EIS

The draft EIS was released in early Jan. BLM will hold a series of public meetings soon to discuss the draft. BLM will then begin formulating a preferred alternative. BLM will consider the State's proposed road to Nuiqsut in the cumulative impact analysis. The final EIS, which will include BLM's preferred alternative, is due out in early July.

Bisson commended Ducker for his skills in coordinating with agencies during the Alpine process. Bisson said Ducker and Susan Childs were among BLM's hardest-working project managers.

LUNCH

The meeting resumed with public comment at 1 pm.

Bill Wielechowski, Anchorage Northeast Community Council

- President of Northeast Community Council, the largest community council in Anchorage.
- Concerned about the proposed 31-mile-long fence the military wants to erect on the northeast side of Anchorage. Placing this fence only 12 feet from residential property lines would impact property values. Other potential impacts to wildlife and public access.
- Asks that the BLM become involved in the military's public process and take an active role to help ensure a sound decision.
- A win-win solution would be for the military to enclose only the actual training range.

Henri Bisson explained the lands involved are withdrawn for military purposes, and while they are used as such, BLM has no legal authority to intervene. Fort Richardson officials have asked BLM for input regarding the proposal, and BLM will do so. But while we may offer suggestions for mitigation, what the military proposes to do with the training area is consistent with the purposes of the withdrawal.

Gary Gustafson suggested individual RAC members participate in the military's public involvement process, rather than the RAC as an advisory body.

Pamela Miller

- The Alpine satellite proposal is the first within NPR-A. The document is a massive, complicated EIS that will set precedent for what happens elsewhere in NPR-A. Thirty days is not an adequate comment period, given the gravity of this decision.
- The range of alternatives doesn't address buffer zones, and the cumulative impact analysis doesn't adequately address proposed roads. Concerned about habitat fragmentation roads would cause. It's important to take the time to deal with these issues adequately.
- Northeast NPR-A: concerned about lack of binding steps; required operating procedures leave a lot to the operator's discretion.
- S. 1466 (Alaska Land Transfer Acceleration Act): concerned about major changes to ANCSA and ANILCA. Agrees it's time to complete land transfer, but concerned that the bill creates new opportunities for land selection by both the State and Native corporations. Concerned about giving DOI enormous discretion, and about impacts to refuges and conservation system units.

END OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

Accelerated Land Transfer Program

BLM's Gary Reimer and Craig Frichtl discussed recent rural outreach efforts.

Reimer explained that State Representative Mary Kapsner, who chairs the Bush caucus, invited BLM to Juneau to meet with rural legislators in early February. While there, they also met with minority and majority members. Legislators were very supportive of BLM's goal to complete land transfer by the year 2009. Bush caucus members emphasized the need for a fair and fast settlement of Native allotments. Minority and majority members were interested in resolving overselection issues.

BLM also went to Bethel at the invitation of the Association of Village Council Presidents. Half of all Native allotments are in the Calista region. Frichtl explained BLM held 24 meetings in 16 area villages to accelerate the Native allotment process. These face-to-face meetings are very productive in setting priorities for getting to final entitlement. This year BLM will contract out \$6 million in "638" agreements (Indian Self-Determination Act contracting) for survey work. An additional \$2 million in contracts will be let for state work, mostly on the North Slope.

Henri Bisson said a D.C. hearing was scheduled the following week on S. 1466. Senator Murkowski's staff revised the bill in response to comments from an earlier hearing in Anchorage.

Spatial Data Management System

BLM's Linda Ricketts and Dennis Walworth explained a new web-based system developed by BLM to collect, manage and distribute public land information. The system gives the public access to Alaska land information and other geographically referenced data. Ricketts explained that BLM will continue to populate the database as new data is available.

Ricketts and Walworth provided an online demonstration to show council members how to use the system to locate an easement in a given area as an example of the system's functional uses.

One council member suggested adding Native and Regional corporation boundaries. Council members expressed enthusiasm for the web-based system and its uses.

RAC Planning Liaison Reports

- South NPR-A: BLM will start pre-planning work this fall and scoping in FY 2005.
- East Alaska: Susan Olsen said she had maps for her subgroup to study following the RAC meeting. She said they would also discuss a process for their involvement in this planning effort.
- Ring of Fire: Charlie Boddy said coal bed natural gas would be the subgroup's focus. He wants to meet with Field Manager June Bailey soon to discuss the RMP.
- Kobuk/Seward Peninsula: no report
- Fire Plan Amendment: no report

The RAC discussed the role of liaisons and the need for making contact with appropriate BLM planning leads at the start of plans, rather than late in the process. The council noted that email was limiting, and suggested more subgroup meetings in conjunction with regular RAC meetings.

Henri Bisson said BLM managers and planning staff were available to the RAC, and would contact council members at important milestones in the planning process. He said BLM would take a more proactive role in engaging the RAC in land use planning.

Teresa Imm said she attended one of the North Slope planning meetings, and wondered if attendees would receive meeting notes or other followup. Bisson said staff would check to see if there was followup correspondence.

BREAK

Proposed Hut-to-Hut System, Chugach National Forest

Gary Gustafson explained he invited Kevin Lynch and John Wolfe of the Alaska Mountain and Wilderness Huts Association to talk about a proposed hut system at Ptarmigan Lake in the Chugach National Forest.

Lynch and Wolfe talked about the need for multi-party hut-to-hut systems, and explained the proposed Chugach hut system would be the first of its kind in Alaska. Standard public use cabins are typically reserved by a single party; multi-party huts house many guests and sometimes an on-site volunteer hutkeeper. Multi-party huts foster a sense of shared stewardship among hut users.

Lynch and Wolfe gave a short slide show of hut systems in use in other states and countries, and volunteer groups managing the hut systems.

Council members asked questions about funding issues, vandalism, and how the hut systems are managed. The presenters explained that most hut systems are kept to an existing footprint, but hut systems can also clean up “dirty” footprints by providing well-marked established trails. Vandalism is rarely an issue, given the remote locations. Funding is always a challenge. Hut-to-hut systems are fee-based, and often run by volunteer organizations.

Meeting recessed at 4:10 p.m.

Friday, February 6, 2004

Council members not present: Sandra Key and Keith Tryck.

The chair called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

John Payne: North Slope Science Initiative

Payne gave a PowerPoint presentation on the North Slope Science Initiative (NSSI), a science-based program that integrates inventory, monitoring and research activities on the North Slope. BLM recently hosted several workshops to enlist agency and stakeholder participation.

Payne and the council discussed how the NSSI and the former Northeast NPR-A Research and Monitoring Team (RMT) would interface. Payne noted the RMT was specific to Northeast NPR-A, while the new science initiative would be broader in scope to encompass research activities across the North Slope.

Payne outlined the proposed structure of the NSSI and major milestones in getting the new strategy in place. He stressed the need for agency support and participation, as well as non-government stakeholders through annual workshops, focus groups, and an interactive web site.

BLM and the RAC discussed the role of the NSSI oversight group. Bisson said changes in the way agencies conduct government-to-government consultation could affect how the NSSI oversight group operates.

RAC Standards and Guidelines

The chair briefed new RAC members on the council's work in helping BLM prepare standards and guidelines for land management decisions. Since Alaska BLM is exempt from the grazing regulations which required standards and guidelines, Henri Bisson decided to adopt the standards as supplementary planning guidance. So the RAC worked with BLM to repackage the standards as planning guidance.

The chair said he felt the document retains the intent of the earlier standards, and was comfortable with approving the document as presented.

Bisson said if the RAC accepted the revised document, he would issue an instruction memorandum to make the document supplemental planning guidance immediately. This would mean managers and staff would consult this document when preparing NEPA documents to ensure compliance.

The RAC unanimously approved the document and thanked Debbie Hollen and her staff for their work.

RAC Subgroup Reports

RMT subgroup

Gustafson said he, Sandra Key, Evie Witten, Teresa Imm and Jim Posey met and teleconferenced to draw up a recommendation for the RAC, which he handed out. He said it was critical that reconstituting the RMT under the RAC be a temporary arrangement only, not to exceed one year. Some council members wondered if one year was realistic.

Henri Bisson said he would charter the group if the arrangement exceeded one year. He also expressed concerns about the narrow focus of the RMT, and added that the only research the former RMT funded was outside NPR-A. He also noted that the Northwest plan did not call for a research and monitoring group. Bisson said he believes in the need for research and monitoring programs and the North Slope Science Initiative would provide a framework for these activities.

David van den Berg was concerned about the lack of a legal requirement to have research and monitoring programs, which otherwise would be at the discretion of managers. Bisson said as BLM moves through the public process for the Northeast amendment, public comments would affect how the amendment addresses this issue.

Gustafson asked if Bisson was in conceptual agreement with the need for the RMT. Bisson said yes, although he would like to see the scope broadened. Susan Olsen asked if BLM could put this in writing for assurance. Bisson said he could and assured the RAC that if the FACA arrangement exceeded one year, he would recharter the group.

RAC Officer Selection

The chair opened the floor for nominations for chair and vice chair. Tom Crafford was nominated for chair, and Charlie Boddy as vice chair. There were no other nominations, so the RAC approved Crafford and Boddy as officers for 2004.

The RAC expressed appreciation for David van den Berg's work as chair in 2003.

BREAK

OHV subgroup

Susan Olsen said her subgroup had obtained pre-planning documents and maps from all three field offices. She said her subgroup would meet after the RAC meeting adjourned to look at the maps and talk about a process. Olsen requested that the RAC be notified prior to scoping meetings when NFO starts the Kobuk-Seward Peninsula RMP.

Public Use Recreation Cabin Subgroup

Gary Gustafson said his subgroup met and came up with a written proposal that lists areas that warrant study for possible public use cabins. The subgroup recommended that BLM evaluate the

need for additional public use cabins during land use planning, and that BLM seek out public partnership opportunities to manage cabins and plan adequately for maintenance.

Bisson said the recreation program had taken some serious funding hits, and while BLM can use fee demo dollars for operations and maintenance once constructed, construction funding remains uncertain.

Gustafson asked that Bisson encourage field managers to consider the need for additional cabins, and provide followup discussion at the next RAC meeting.

2004 RAC Nominations

Henri Bisson encouraged RAC members whose terms are up to seek renomination if their schedules allow. The Federal Register notice calling for nominations will be published in early March, and would kick off a 45-day nomination period. BLM asked the RAC's help in soliciting potential candidates for RAC vacancies.

RAC Chairs' Conference, May 11-13

Tom Crafford will attend the RAC chair's conference in Phoenix in May. The RAC was encouraged to think about issues or topics they would like Crafford to address at the conference, and bring those to the RAC's April meeting.

July Field Tour, July 29-31

June Bailey said lodging was very tight at Unalakleet the last week of July. One of the town's two lodges is completely booked and the other lodge has limited rooms. The RAC discussed camping and was agreeable to making it a wilderness trip. Bailey said she would provide itinerary details for the RAC to discuss at the April council meeting.

The next meeting of the RAC is April 29-30 in Fairbanks.

Adjourn 11:10 a.m.